

House actions on aid: 'Duarte si! Contras no!'

STAT

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—The civil war in El Salvador grows steadily wider while protests against U.S. involvement in it continue to mount. But those factors do not prevent Congress from shoveling more and more funds into that Vietnam-like quagmire.

On May 24, for example, the Democratic-controlled House approved more military aid to the Salvadoran government for the second time in two weeks. By a 267-154 margin, the lawmakers cleared a \$62 million, no-strings emergency package clamored for by the Reagan administration. The size of the majority reflected the defection of moderates from a previously broad Democratic bloc opposed to White House policy in El Salvador. The May 24 vote also brings to \$126.6 million the amount of military aid for El Salvador approved by Congress so far this year, compared to \$81.3 million in 1983.

Moments later, however, the House once again balked at financing the CIA-directed war against Nicaragua. The 241-177 vote rejecting \$21 million in aid for the contras was the most decisive of the three rollcalls in the House during the past year that have gone against the CIA operation. Twenty-four Republicans joined 217 Democrats to defeat the military assistance package sought by the administration.

The House also voted May 23 by an overwhelming 341-64 margin to bar the dispatch of combat troops to El Salvador or Nicaragua unless there is a "clear and present danger" to the U.S., its embassies or its citizens. Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) called the vote "blatantly cowardly," and other Republicans claimed it was an unconstitutional restraint on the President's authority to make war. The next day the House amended the measure to include all of Central America.

DUARTE LOBBIES CONGRESS

The heavy tally in favor of more aid for El Salvador was meanwhile seen as a vote of confidence in President-elect José Napoleon Duarte. His 4-day lobbying tour of Washington just prior to the House vote was hailed as "triumphal" by the Washington Post, which wrote that Duarte "swept through Congress like a conquering hero." The new presi-

dent made it respectable for many skeptical lawmakers to vote for more aid by insisting that he is committed to democratic reforms in El Salvador (see story, page 15). The propitious timing of events in El Salvador also had a great deal to do with the House vote (see story, page 1).

Despite last week's House action, the 1984 aid bill for El Salvador remains bottled up in Congress because it is still tied to the contra funding proposal. The Republican-controlled Senate, which has already passed both arms packages, will not act on the matter until it returns from recess June 4. The Senate Intelligence Committee, in a secret session May 23, meanwhile approved a full \$28 million CIA request for the contras for the 1985 fiscal year.

Unlike the vote on El Salvador, where he broke with Speaker Tip O'Neill (D-Mass.), House Majority Leader Jim Wright (D-Tex.) helped lead the fight against financing the contras' war. But it was Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana, a senior Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, who best expressed the majority sentiment in the House. "Let's end this war that just keeps escalating' . . . the war that has not worked . . . the war that is against the law . . . the war that hurts the CIA and hurts the U.S. . . . the war that brings no peace." Hamilton urged his colleagues.

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Republicans backing more funds for the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries argued that cutting off the aid would undermine the Duarte regime's attempts to consolidate power in El Salvador. The White House had at first threatened to veto the entire Central America aid package if aid for the contras were turned down by the House. As the vote neared, the veto threat was abandoned, but the administration is still seeking ways to restore the \$21 million in supplemental funding for 1984.

Earlier this year, administration officials warned that funding for the contras would run out this spring if emergency aid were not approved. But now the CIA is saying that the contras have enough resources to keep on fighting until Oct. 1, when the 1985 fiscal year starts. Some officials argue that if Congress allows the funding for the CIA operation to merely dwindle down, but does not officially terminate it, the contras could be financed by shifting Pentagon accounts to the CIA.

During the House's deliberations over the war against Nicaragua, the Washington Post reported, based on interviews with unnamed U.S. officials, that the CIA already was funneling aid to the contras through Israel. Alarmed by this report, Rep. Hamilton called on the CIA to make a full accounting of its assistance to the anti-Sandinista guerrillas. ■